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ABSTRACT

In some communities, alcohol becomes a part of socialization early in life. In one such community, softball for women has become a popular pastime. Twenty-seven of 48 teams in the community were sponsored by local taverns, bars, or restaurants where alcohol was served. Teams sponsored by taverns were encouraged to meet at the taverns before or after a game. To examine the relationship between sports and alcohol, 183 female softball players, coaches, and staff completed a questionnaire on alcohol-related concerns. The results revealed that, compared to women on teams with other sponsors, women on alcohol distributor and tavern sponsored teams were more likely to agree that drinking was encouraged, that beer and softball went together, that teams go to the bar after the game regardless of game outcome, and that coaches seldom address the effect of drinking on quality of play. These findings suggest a relationship between team sponsorship and the attitudes of female recreational softball team members. Future studies might examine the same issues among male players. (NB)

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Women's Softball Players' Attitudes Toward Alcohol Use & Abuse

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Objectives

The objectives of this research were to measure the attitude, awareness, and reasoning associated with alcohol use and alcohol knowledge among women on local community softball teams. Within the area where this data was collected, 27 out of 48 teams were sponsored by local taverns, bars or restaurants where alcohol is served.

Each year more women of all ages from seventeen years and older, become involved in a variety of community organized sports. This is due in part to the increasing national interest in physical fitness and also to the need to be a part of a group with a common goal or purpose. Alcohol use in these recreational settings has become a source of concern for agencies that deal with alcohol use and abuse. Bars and taverns have become "the place to go" for entertainment during the sport season as well as after the sport has concluded. Parties, events, and outings revolve around the sport with family members or friends serving alcohol as the main beverage. Beer is the first choice of alcoholic drink for women with wine coolers running a close second according to the New York State Beverage Commission.

Perspectives

Our society has traditionally had strong feelings regarding women's use of alcohol. In recent years alcohol use by women has been increasing. Current research shows that sixty percent of all adult women over 18 drink alcohol at least occasionally, while 40 percent are abstainers. Fifty four percent of adult women who do drink, do so moderately (defined as less than 60 drinks a month) while five percent are heavy drinkers (more than 60 drinks a month). Women's drinking problems are often viewed as less serious than men's and their condition may be misdiagnosed by family and friends, and even by professional health care providers (Clark & Midanik, 1981; Merritt & Kirschstein, 1984).

The stigma of disapproval of women's drinking prevelant through the 1950's is still with us although the disapproval of spouse, employees, or community is given in a different manner today. Research has shown men who abuse alcohol are more readily forgiven than women (Sandmaier, 1976). Women today have as much or more stress in the workplace, through volunteer commitments, and in the home as their male counterparts. Even so, it is still socially more acceptable today among employees, as well as with spouses and peers, for men to abuse alcohol than it is for women to do so.

This research involved women who reside in a community where alcohol becomes a part of socialization early in life. The population of the city where the data was gathered is approximately 20,000, making the ratio of taverns to residents 1 to every 270 residents (these figures include residents of all ages). The area offers few forms of entertainment where alcohol is not a major part of the event. Softball for women has become a great outlet for exercise and family outings.

At the practices and/or games alcoholic beverages play a part. Teams sponsored by taverns are encouraged to meet before or after an event to celebrate a victory, relax or mourn a defeat. Often the sponsors will give "free pitchers" or drinks on the house to teams which encourages the players to indulge in more alcohol consumption than they normally would.

Local schools, churches and other organizations have implemented a marginal prevention effort in educating women on the use and abuse of alcohol. Women tend to perceive that they have an awareness of what alcohol can do to their systems if abused.

Methods

Softball has been a favorite choice of a summer sport for many reasons: Women of all ages can participate. The sport takes a minimal amcunt of time per week for games and practices. Homemakers as well as those who hold full time positions in the community play for exercise as well as the sport. Leagues are ranked according to the skills of the teams and players (leagues ranked A through E). Competition is keen, so games often become exciting and challenging.

Stemming from the fact that a large number of taverns sponsor teams and promote drinking by providing free pitchers of beer after the games or practices, softball for women in the small city environment studied offered a logical opportunity for research concerning sports and alcohol. Four teams from each league were selected for the study spanning the league standings from first to last place. A total of 250 women were asked to respond to a questionnaires consisting of 20 questions. Three teams refused to participate in the study as did a few individual players on the participating teams. A total of 183 players, coaches and staff took part.

The questionnaire was designed to focus on a number of alcohol related concerns. The 20 items dealt with alcohol awareness; the connection if any, between women in sports and alcohol; whether teams sponsored by taverns were treated differently, (e.g. purchase of equipment or uniforms); what degree skill had to do with choice of league or team; and the attitude of players, staff and coaches toward alcohol use and abuse.

Results

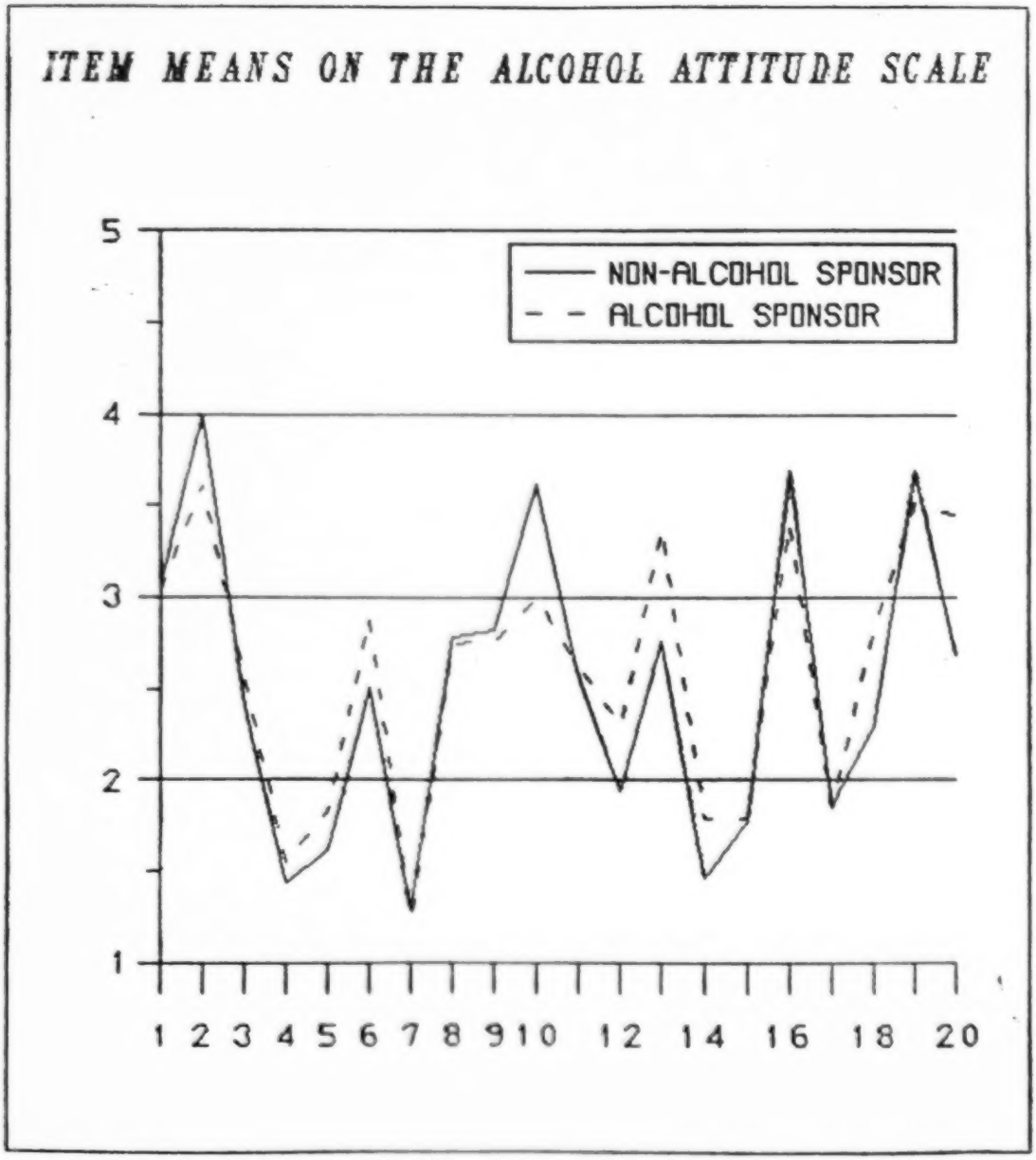
Using an SPSS program (Norusis, 1985) a canonical discriminant analysis was performed to determine response patterns of women on alcohol distributor and tavern sponsored teams as compared with those women on teams with other sponsors. The discriminant analysis patterns differed significantly (Wilkes-Lambda .8383; Chi Square 23.633; p .01). In large measure the results were due to the pattern of responses of women on alcohol sponsored teams being more likely to agree that drinking was encouraged, that beer and softball go together, that whether the team wins or not the group goes to the bar after the game, and that coaches seldom address the effect of drinking on quality of play. Alcohol sponsored team members were less likely to agree that a winning performance is important. Thus it appears that there is a relationship between sponsorship and attitudes of women recreational sports participants in softball league play.

Conclusions

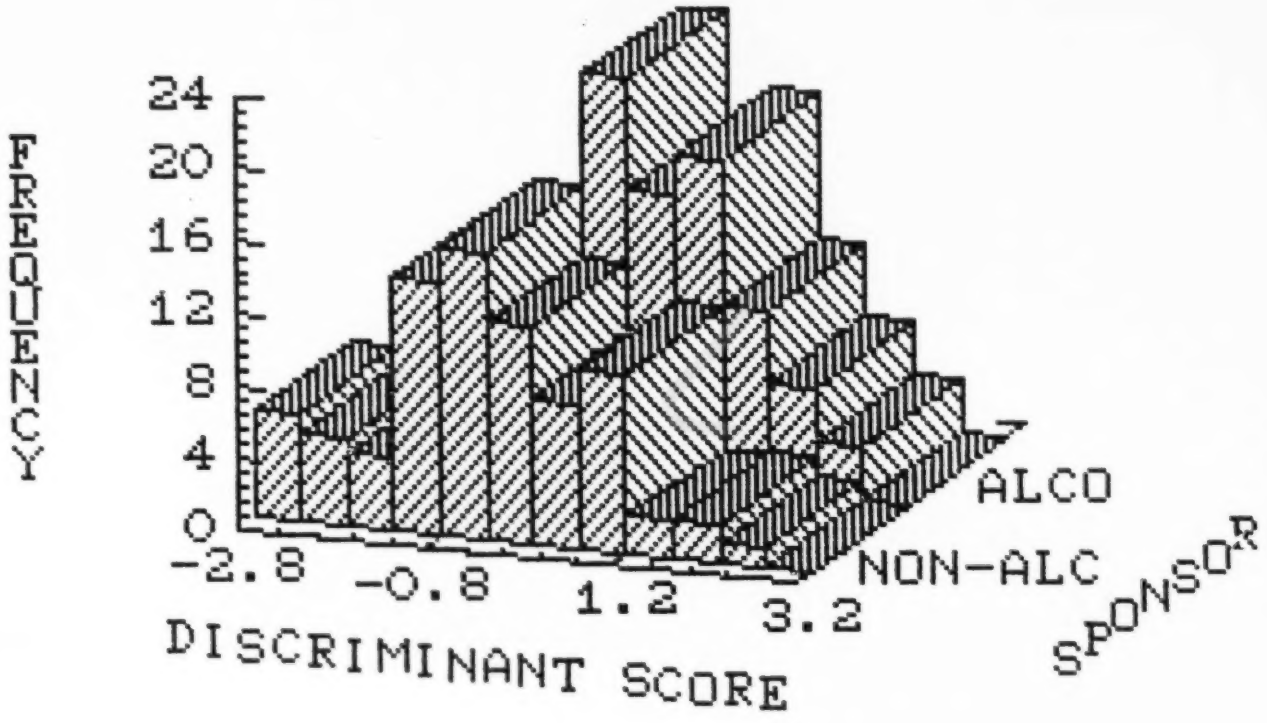
Evidence from recreational sports teams and individual women players suggests that in the area where the data was gathered there is a strong link between the alcohol industry and recreational softball. Alcoholic beverage distributors and taverns sponsor more than half the women's teams in the city. While this study did not include men's teams or winter sports such as basketball and bowling it is suspected that similar patterns may exist in those situations.

Reports from women interviewed after completing our questionnaire reveal that team members are encouraged to congregate at sponsoring bars after their games. Such behavior enhances opportunities and social conditions for drinking alcohol. The fact that players arrive at the bars excited about the game and thirsty due to exertion contributes to setting conditions for consuming greater amounts of alcohol than might be the case under other circumstances. In addition the mind set of sports going with alcohol is promoted daily by national television advertising that encourages by association the perception of a linkage between drinking and sports or any physical activity. Thus, going to a bar following a games appropriate and even expected.

The results of this project have led to the formation of additional hypotheses that call for further study. It is suggested that a follow-up project should encompass men's teams as well. Further, a modification in the survey would be beneficial. This would request the respondent to reply to the items with the instructions to answer one set of statements with "myself as I am" as one orientation and to a second set of items using "myself as I would like to be." These procedures would enable us to make male-female comparisons and to perform present self-ideal self analyses. This approach would provide a more comprehensive data base that would make possible a clearer understanding of the social incentives and sanctions involved in alcoholic beverage use and abuse connected with recreational sports.


ITEM MEANS ON THE ALCOHOL ATTITUDE SCALE
NON-ALCOHOL SPONSOR
ALCOHOL SPONSOR
5
4
3
2
1
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 12 14 16 18 20

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF DISCRIMINANT SCORES BY SPONSOR TYPE



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